

Romanian Creators of Architectural Heritage

Architecture is a powerful shaper of national identity and community coherence, and highlighting its formative and aesthetic dimension is a gesture of normality.

„Monuments, like books, are the interpretation of Time” – Mircea Eliade used to say. The houses, the streets, the markets of a town represent a vital fabric where we are born, play, learn, love, work, and die. Each space and place carry a story about our identity, past, present and future.

In Kevin Lynch’s research on people and the perception of built environment, *The Image of the City*, he states that each of us carry around an „image map”, a mental projection of reality, marked by physical, cultural and pschyco-social components that shape the memory of the space.

In this context, the exhibition *Romanian Creators of Architectural Heritage* aims to highlight the constant evolution in time and the quality of the Romanian architecture, regardless of changes of political regimes, presenting the most relevant works built between 1869 and 1989, which are all part of both Romanian and European cultural heritage. The exhibition opened at the National Biennale of Architecture in Bucharest last year to mark the anniversary of 120 years of existence of the Romanian Union of Architects and of architectural education in Romania.

The end of the 19th century, marked by the creation of the modern Romanian national state and by the consolidation of the national public institutions, enabled the development of a body of architecture professionals. The first Romanian architects studied primarily in Paris, at Ecole de Beaux Arts, and afterwards at Accademia di Roma in Italy. Following an international architecture competition for the construction of the Synodal Palace (competition won by Dimitrie Maimarolu), a group of 24 architects of the time set up, on 26 February 1891, the Romanian Architects’ Society (RAS), among them Alexandru Orascu, Alexandru Savulescu, Ion Mincu, Grigore Cerchez, George Sterian and Dimitrie Maimarolu.

On 15 October 1892, they established a private architecture school that 5 years later became the state funded National Architecture School, known today as “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest. The first President of RAS was Alexandru Orascu, and the first Chancellor of the Architecture School was Ion N. Socolescu.

The turmoil of the 19th century, with its revolutionary movements and the emergence of new states, shaped the Romanian space, as well. Aristocratic mansions, as well as the first buildings of various public institutions were designed by German, Austrian, Italian and French architects. Towards the second half of the 19th century, young Romanian architects, outstanding alumni of European schools, started to win national competitions and, consequently, were commissioned important projects.

The first Romanian architect recognized for his merits was Alexandru Orascu, who, between 1857 and 1869 built the neoclassical University Palace in Bucharest, extended by N. Ghika Budesti in 1927. At the same time, major French architects contributed to the building of some important institutions: Albert Galleron and Cassier Bernard – The Palace of the National Bank of Romania (1883-1885); Albert Galleron – the Romanian Athenaeum (1888) and Louis Gotterau - CEC Palace (1896-1900); Paul Gotterau - Palace of the National Library.

The prestige of a young Romanian architect, Ion Mincu (1852-1912), an outstanding graduate of L’ecole de Beaux Arts Paris, brought to the public attention the idea of a national architecture, inspired by local traditions. The porch of the country houses with carved wooden

pillars, the decorative elements made of colour glazed pottery, the Brancovan arches, the cross rope, the ornamented roof edges, they are all recollections of the past. The house of General Al. Lahovary (1886) and later on the Central Girls' School (1890), The Galati Administrative Palace (1904), The Commercial Bank of Craiova (1906) are representative of the style that would later on be known as Neo-Romanian, that marked over 50 years of architecture.

The Neo-Romanian style gained numerous followers: Petre Antonescu – Bucharest City Hall (1906-1912), Grigore Cerchez – the Palace of the Architecture School (1912-1927), Ghika Budesti – the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (1912) – all are important examples of the new aesthetic.

The European synchronism and the art-nouveau style are reflected in impressive projects such as Constanta Casino – Daniel Renard (1910), The Iasi Cultural Palace – I.D.Berindei (1890-1926).

The industrial revolution, the use of metal and reinforced concrete in construction found their way in Romanian architecture through Anghel Saligny's work (the platform of the North Railway Station – 1878, Cernavoda Bridge 1890-1895, the Meat and Fish Market, the Unirii Square – 1919, demolished). The use of reinforced concrete in the construction of the Constanta warehouses (1889), also by Anghel Saligny, places us among the first European countries to use reinforced concrete.

The modern and functional architecture of Horia Creanga (ARO building 1931, Obor markets 1959, Malaxa factories 1940), Duiliu Marcu (Government Palace, the Military Academy 1941), Octav Doicescu (Banloc building 1934), Grigore Ionescu (Toria Sanatorium 1935), G.M Cantacuzino (Hotel Belona 1934) mark our contribution to the European vanguard movement. The constructive solutions and the balanced articulation of the volumes place Romanian modernism along the elite of European avant-garde.

The presence of several multicultural personalities such as Marcel Iancu (Vila Juster, 1931), architect and artist, proves an inspired dialogue between arts. Great scholars, such as G.M. Cantacuzino, professor of history and theory of architecture, who, together with Octav Doicescu and D.E. Miculescu funded *Simetria* magazine (1939-1947), brought their outstanding contribution to the specialised literature. G.M. Cantacuzino wrote a series of books: *Essay on Palladio*; *Travel Impressions*; *Arches, alcoves and stones*; *Vigilance Quarter*. Grigore Ionescu, one of the most important Chancellors of the Architecture School, published the first history of Romanian architecture in 1937 and the first illustrated guide of Bucharest.

Religious architecture was outstandingly represented by Mihaescu Nae – Cathedral of Sulina 1911, Dimitrie Maimarolu – the Armenian Church 1915, I. D.Trainasescu – the Dudu Madona Church 1928, Ionescu Berechet – Casin Church 1937, I.D. Trainasecu – Cathedral of Timisoara 1946.

Romanian Creators of Architectural Heritage is an on-going project, aimed at also highlighting the contribution of Romanian architects during the communist period (1948-1989), who strived to carry on building at high standards, in line with the previous achievements.

Within the context of the acknowledgement of the degree issued by Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), that represents an exceptional performance of the Romanian school of architecture, we consider the opening of this exhibition in London an important appreciation of the value its creators.

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